

Sofia, EQAR dialogue - policy developments after Erevan Communique

Knowledge café - Legal framework on cross border EQA

I. Republic of Moldova (case study) - Short presentation

The education sector continued to be one of the most dynamic sectors and a major priority in Moldova. Unfortunately, output and quality of education still need improvement due to the lack of qualified teaching staff, inefficiencies and an inadequate match between education offered and the needs of the labor market. Reform of the education sector progressed significantly with the approval of the new Code of Education in the Parliament and the Education Strategy 2020 . These two educational policy documents are based on three main pillars:

- Access
- Quality
- Relevance

During last years the Ministry of Education concentrated on promoting quality and excellence in the Moldovan education. We have established the National Quality Assurance Agency for Professional Education (NQAAPPE) and the National School Inspectorate, both institutions aiming to promote and ensure quality in education, and promoted new legislation for the organization and functioning of Master and Doctoral programs, the place where research and education are strongly interconnected.

The last legislative decisions:

- We established a new National Quality Assurance Agency for Professional Education in 2014;
- In 2015 we provided the national NQAAPPE with normative documents (Regulation framework of Agency, international election of 15 Management Board members, first exercise of Agency - new Methodology for provisional authorization of Doctoral schools and programs according to ESG).
- The national NQAAPPE conducted the external evaluation of the new doctoral schools and programs.
- At the moment, the national NQAAPPE is in the process of approval of methodology, accreditation standards, criteria and indicators according to ESG.

II. Legal framework on cross border and the legislations provisions in the Education Code (2014) of republic of Moldova:

Art.113 (4) The external assessment of quality in the higher education shall be performed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education or by another quality assessment agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

(5) The quality assessment in the higher education shall encompass:

- a) the institutional capacity;
- b) the educational efficiency, including academic outputs;
- c) the quality of initial and continuous professional training programs;
- d) the institutional management of quality;
- e) the results of scientific research and/or artistic creation;
- f) the compliance between the internal assessment and real situation.

Art.114 (10) The decision on the provisional authorization, accreditation, non-accreditation or withdrawal of the activity right of a higher education institution or study program shall be adopted by the Government upon the proposal of the Ministry of Education, based on the results of the assessment performed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education.

Art.115. (1) The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education is an administrative authority of national interest, with legal personality, autonomous to the Government, independent in its decisions and organization, and funded from the state budget and own revenues.

(2) The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

a) to enforce the state policies in the quality area of vocational, higher and continuous education;

b) to develop in line with the European standards in the area and make public its own methodology of assessment and accreditation of the institutions providing professional training programs and their programs, and to propose them for Government's approval;

...

n) to undertake the necessary measures to be listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (**EQAR**) in, at most, three years since its establishment.

Art. 82 (10) The branches of the accredited higher education institutions from other states, established in the Republic of Moldova, shall be assigned the appropriate category of the higher education institution from the country of origin, if the institution for external quality assessment, which granted the accreditation is included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

III. Last activities regarding the recognition of the external evaluation provided by EQAR registered agencies:

- During 2013-2014 the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (ARACIS) assessed the Bachelor programs in Law in 17 higher education institutions in the country (17 programs). All decisions of ARACIS regarding the accreditation or withdrawal of the activity right on the Law programs were approved by Government in this year.
- During 2014 the Estonian Quality Assurance Agency in Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) assessed 26 Master programs in Law. Both processes were conducted in the context of the National Justice Reforms Strategy.
- Also during 2013-2015 Germany Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (AQAS) assessed 11 Bachelor programs.
- All decisions of the registered agencies will be approved by Government.

The activities we provided with EQAR registered Agencies:

- The international procurement of the services for external evaluations of quality of the programs in higher education,
- The accreditation methodology is based on Moldovan legislation, European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and feedback from the Ministry Education (MoE) and HEI-s.
- Each accreditation committee was supported by a coordinator, and an interpreter,
- The Template for the Self-Evaluation of Study Programmes and the overall timetable of the accreditation process were coordinated by the MoE.
- The registered EQAR Agencies conducted training sessions for university staff and evaluation experts ;
- HEI-s had minimum two weeks to comment on the reports and correct the factual mistakes if necessary. The accreditation committees reviewed the comments and made some changes in the reports, if needed. The reports along with comments from the HEI-s were sent to the Quality Assessment Council /Management Board,
- Finally these agencies provided the decision for each program and also general reports comparatively with the other European programs/countries.
- Our NQAAPE also participated as an observer in assessment visits in order to gain some experience in the work of assessment experts and the organisation of assessment.

IV. Accreditation results (example EKKA accreditation on Master of Law programs):

The accreditation committees evaluated a study programme at a given higher education level in five separate assessment areas (hereinafter referred to as ‘component assessments’):

1. Study programme and its development
2. Teaching and learning
3. Teaching staff
4. Students
5. Resources

Looking at the general picture, the best results were in component 1: the study programme and its development, where 18 programmes out of 26 conformed to requirements. At the same time, this component also had most of the negative results: 5 programmes did not conform to requirements.

The weakest components were 3 (teaching staff) and 4 (students): only 3 and 4 programmes respectively conformed to requirements. In both cases, there were two programmes that did not conform at all.

Component 5 (resources) had no non-conforming programmes: 8 programmes conformed to requirements fully and 18 partially.

In component 2 (teaching and learning), 7 programmes conformed to requirements and 2 did not. The rest conformed partially.